TRANSMITTAL SLIP | DATE: 14 May 80

TO: [redacted]

ROOM NO: 5G00 | BUILDING: Hqs.

RE: [redacted]

This carries a rather misleading title and text is a bit discursive. Recommend no further dissem.

[redacted]

FYI

FROM: [redacted]

ROOM NO. 7E62 | BUILDING Hqs. | EX [redacted]

FORM NO 1 FEB 55 241 REPLACES FORM 36-8 WHICH MAY BE USED. (47)

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A/NIO/W

STRATEGIC WARNING STAFF
Room 1C925, Pentagon

13 May 80

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[redacted]

SWS file

To: NIO/Warning

Forwarded herewith is a memo which we prepared for your information. We anticipate making no other distribution unless otherwise directed.

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[redacted]

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SECRET

Strategic Warning Staff
Washington, D.C. 20301

NFAC-351-4-80

S-0046/SWS

13 May 1980

MEMORANDUM FOR: NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER FOR WARNING

FROM: Director, SWS

SUBJECT: Potential for Soviet Intervention in Syria

Introduction

There have been reports from various sources of late that President Asad of Syria has been considering calling for Soviet help to maintain him in power in the event of uncontrollable internal disturbances. This memorandum examines the evidence on the situation as we see it and provides our interpretation of recent events in Syria relating to the likelihood that Asad will request the Soviets to intervene in Syria.

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When Syrian President Asad visited the USSR in late 1979, he and the Soviets are reported to have agreed that the balance of power in the Middle East unquestionably favors Israel. Additionally, there is evidence that Asad feels threatened by Iraq, a threat which complicates and exacerbates Syria's security problems. Asad, to bolster his military posture, asked the Soviets for sophisticated arms, including advanced aircraft and ground-to-ground missiles of greater range than the SCUD and FROG missiles currently in the Syrian inventory. The Soviets were likely receptive to the Syrian arms request, but [redacted] they set a high 25X1
price for them. The Soviets have long sought a treaty with Syria and seem to be applying increasing pressure to get Syria to sign a joint agreement. Despite Asad's increasing vulnerability, he has resisted thus far all Soviet efforts to sign a Friendship or similar treaty in connection with Soviet military assistance. [redacted] 25X1

In virtually all discussions of military matters, it is apparent that the Soviets are seeking expanded influence over the Syrian armed forces not only through a treaty but also through expanded contacts in training and technical matters and increased consultations in military matters in general. The number of Soviet advisors in Syria probably is increasing to cope with the large quantities of modern weapons being introduced as aid, and the KGB evidently is providing some assistance to the Syrian security services. The Syrians seem, however, to be very much aware of the unwanted influence which closer contact with the Soviets would bring [redacted] 25X1
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[redacted] Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko visited Damascus on 27 January. The Soviets were generally seeking to diminish the international opprobrium over the invasion of Afghanistan. They were also attempting to force their way into the Middle East peace process. Their relationship with Syria has been the principal entree into the region, and many of Syria's concerns have, to a significant extent, become Soviet concerns as well. The Syrians may have feared renewed Israeli military aggression and feeling isolated more than ever from other Arab countries over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, sought visible Soviet backing. Asad probably intended this meeting both to gain assurances of Soviet military support should Israel strike Syria and to press again for more sophisticated weapons. The presence of such weapons represent a significant and visible statement of Soviet support. [redacted]

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It is difficult to gauge what all of the Soviet expectations of Gromyko's meetings with Asad were, although the evidence suggests that they believed that Asad was in urgent need of strong, immediate Soviet support and would, therefore, be susceptible to pressure to sign a friendship treaty. Such was not to be the case. Although Asad may have been given Gromyko's assurances of Soviet airlift resupply in the event of full-scale hostilities and probably gained some assurances of Soviet support in offsetting U.S. military activities in the Middle East, he would not sign a treaty. Moreover, he evidently refused to endorse officially the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. [redacted]

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[redacted]

Reports of Asad's insecurity and growing dependence on Soviet support have evidently reached other governments in the region. [redacted] President Zia of Pakistan noted that Syria's serious internal problems might one day cause it to call on the Soviet Union to maintain internal stability as the Afghans had done. The Palestine Liberation Organization, having perceived a growing weakness on the part of their long-standing patron, has decided to quietly put some distance between itself

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and the Asad regime. The Soviets' belief that Asad was prepared to sign a Friendship Treaty in January reveals that they interpreted Asad's fortunes, or at least his confidence, to be declining.

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The Soviets evidently believed that for some reason--perhaps the deteriorating internal situation in Syria or overtures by unidentified Syrian government officials--that Asad was susceptible to Soviet pressure to sign a "Treaty of Friendship."

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In any event, Asad's failure to endorse Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and his evident refusal to accept a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union indicate to us that he does not perceive himself as totally dependent on the Soviets, the reports of the various sources discussed above notwithstanding.

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